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SUBJECT: PAKISTAN MEDIA REACTION: MARCH 27, 2009

Summary: All newspapers front-paged President Obama's phone call to President Zardari and his Afghan counterpart Karzai to "discuss new strategy for Afghanistan and Pakistan." Reports of suicide attack on a restaurant in Jandola (NWFP) that killed 12 people dominated front pages on Friday. U.S. General Eikenberry's remarks that he made during the confirmation hearing in the Senate that the "Pakistan Army and ISI have had a 'very ambiguous relationship' with the Taliban" received extensive coverage. The statement by Foreign Office spokesman that the "drone attacks are counterproductive and the U.S. will review its position" also garnered attention.

Newspapers ran editorials on a host of subjects concerning national politics and the regional security situation. The prestigious daily, "Dawn," underlined the need of "better trade ties" between Pakistan and the U.S. to "help provide an alternative to young, jobless Pakistanis otherwise drifting towards militancy and extremism." Commenting on the drone attacks, the populist Urdu daily, "Khabrain," advised the U.S. to "help build the capacity of Pakistan's intelligence agencies and law enforcement departments." The mass circulation Urdu daily, "Jang," noted that "it is ironical that whenever the local populace expresses its resentment over these (drone) attacks, they are labeled as terrorists." End Summary.

News Stories

"Obama Discusses New Strategy With Zardari, Karzai" "Dawn" (03/27)

"US President Barack Obama called President Asif Ali Zardari and his Afghan counterpart Hamid Karzai on Thursday to tell them Washington had completed a review of its new strategy for Afghanistan and Pakistan, officials said."

"12 Killed In Suicide Attack On Restaurant" "Dawn" (03/27)

"Suicide bomber struck a restaurant in the frontier region of Jandola on Thursday morning, killing 12 people, including a pregnant woman who was passing by. Twenty-two people were injured."

"Sufi Discusses Swat Peace With Fazlullah" "Daily Times" (03/27)

"Tehreek-e-Nifaz-e-Shariat Muhammadi chief Maulana Sufi Muhammad met Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan Chief Maulana Fazlullah in Matta tehsil of Swat on Thursday, a private TV channel reported. It said the meeting was in connection with the establishment of peace in the valley."

"US General Claims Army, ISI Playing Ambiguous Role" "Dawn" (03/27)

"The Pakistan army and the ISI have had a "very ambiguous relationship" with the Taliban over the last 15 years and some within the two institutions may still support them, a US general told a Senate panel on Thursday."

"Pakistan Wants Review Of US Drone Attack Policy" "Daily Times" (03/27)

"Pakistan on Thursday urged the United States to discontinue unilateral drone strikes inside Pakistan, saying the attacks harmed Islamabad's efforts to defeat terrorism through popular support, Foreign Office spokesman Abdul Basit said at a weekly press briefing."

"Pakistan In Serious Talks With US Over Drone Attacks: Kaira" "The News" (03/27)

"Pakistan is in serious negotiation with US over drone attacks on the country's tribal regions, Minister for information and Broadcasting Qamar Zaman Kaira said on Thursday."

"Force Alone Won't Work, Pakistan Tells US" "Dawn" (03/27)

"Pakistan cautioned the United States and its allies in the war on terror on Thursday against increasing the use of force in Afghanistan and said the strategy would not work."

"FATA officials deny North Waziristan missile strike" "Daily Times" (03/27)

"The FATA Secretariat on Thursday denied there had been a US missile strike in North Waziristan that is said to have killed five people."

"Kerry Pledges To Re-Introduce Pakistan Aid Bill" "Daily Times" (03/27)

"Influential US Senator John Kerry pledged on Thursday to 'soon' reintroduce a bill on expanding economic assistance for Pakistan, and said strengthening the civilian Pakistani government is vital to helping the country rein in terrorists in the border region with Afghanistan."

"Pakistan May Get \$700m From WB, ADB" "Daily Times" (03/27)

"Pakistan is likely to get \$700 million from the World Bank (WB) and the Asian Development Bank (ADB) by the end of March, a Finance Ministry official has said."

"Zardari Asks Baloch Resistance Groups To Enter Into Talks" "Dawn" (03/27)

"President Asif Ali Zardari moved on Thursday to grapple with a violent nationalist movement in the province, wooing angry Baloch groups to enter into talks with the government to remove their grievances."

"Despite Cash Crunch, All Needs Of Military To Be Met: Gilani" "Dawn" (03/27)

"Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani said on Thursday that any threat to the country's territorial integrity and sovereignty would be countered with full force."

"Internal Threat Has Weakened Pakistan, Weakness May Prompt Indian Attack: Gilani" "Daily Times" (03/27)

"Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani on Thursday warned that any internal weakness might prompt India to attack Pakistan. Addressing a conference at the National Defense University, the prime minister stressed the need for an effective strategy to deal with both external and internal threats facing the country."

"US May Open Consulate In Quetta" "The News" (03/27)

"The United States is thinking of establishing its consulate in Quetta on an urgent basis. The US diplomats are engaged in consultations with important officials with regard to the proposition. Three of its consulates are already working in Karachi,

Lahore and Peshawar. It has robust diplomatic presence in Pakistan with the largest diplomatic mission in the federal capital."

"Iran, India May Join US War In Afghanistan" "Dawn" (03/27)

"A key US senator said on Thursday that the United States and Iran might begin their cooperation for stabilizing Afghanistan after a meeting between officials of the two countries in The Hague next week. We also need to reach out to Afghanistan's other neighbors, including India, China, and Iran," Senator John Kerry told the confirmation hearing for the new US ambassador to Afghanistan."

Editorials/Op-eds

"A New Strategy," an editorial in the Karachi-based center-left independent national English daily "Dawn" (cir. 55,000) (03/27)

"The rise of militancy correlates critically to economic conditions. So what is the single most important thing America can do to help Pakistan's sliding economy and, at the same time, restrain militancy? The answer in a nutshell: help build our industry. . . Investors and producers in the US would also benefit by accessing a growing consumer market of more than 170 million people in Pakistan, and other markets beyond its western borders. On the political front, better trade ties should help provide an alternative to young, jobless Pakistanis otherwise drifting towards militancy and extremism, and bring about peace and stability in the region. Such economic measures, and not drones, can win the war against militancy."

"Another Drone Attack," an editorial in the Lahore-based populist center-right Urdu daily "Khabrain" (cir. 50,000) (03/27)

"The reality is that drone attacks are fanning anti-U.S. sentiments among the Pakistani public, and this act by the U.S. government is leading to an increase in extremism and terrorism instead of curbing them. A U.S. think tank's suggestion that missile attacks are not a long-term solution to combat militancy is accurate. Instead of carrying out attacks itself, the U.S. should help build the capacity of Pakistan's intelligence agencies and law enforcement agencies."

"U.S. Drone Attacks And Responsibilities Of Government," an editorial in the leading mass circulation centrist Urdu daily "Jang" (cir. 300,000) (03/26)

"Despite Pakistan's continuous protest, there is no halt of the U.S. drone attacks on the Pakistani border areas. And now there are understandable indications that Balochistan too will be hit by the drone predators. The U.S. authorities have always claimed killing of alien militants as a result of these attacks, but on the contrary, the local inhabitants of the affected areas tell totally different stories. Furthermore, it is also ironical that whenever the local populace expresses its resentment over these attacks, they are labeled as terrorists."

"Expansion Of War Theatre," an op-ed by Imtaiz Gul" in the Karachi-based center-left independent national English daily "Dawn" (cir. 55,000) (03/27)

"In an interview with The Washington Post, Kilcullen warned that if Pakistan went out of control, it would 'dwarf' all the crises in the world today. This warning comes days before Richard Holbrooke, special envoy for the region, formally unveils his report to President Barrack Obama. President Obama is searching for a new strategy that will change the course of the Afghan conflict by taking the following steps: helping Afghanistan and Pakistan become self-sufficient in countering extremism; providing some hope that US military commitment there will eventually end; gradually shifting the burden for the country's security away from the US and Nato; neutralizing Al Qaeda wherever its leaders are. . . Is Pakistan in the eye of the storm? US is about to unleash a two-pronged strategy on Pakistan; based on the presumption that Al Qaeda has fanned out in the country and is using smaller hideouts in places like Quetta, Dera Ismail Khan, Kohat and Karachi. The CIA is gradually extending its drone attacks into areas where it finds traces of Al Qaeda. Come what may, we will eradicate them, is the message. . ."

"Drone Attacks Will Continue, "an Op-ed by Air Marshal Ayaz Ahmed

Khan," in the center-right national English daily "The Nation" (cir. 20,000) (03/27)

"The drone attack policy has been continued by President Barack Obama, with threats to bomb Quetta and suspected terrorist hideouts in Balochistan. Underlining the urgency in Washington to step up cooperation with Islamabad to contain the deteriorating security situation in South and West Asia CIA Director Leon Panetta's visit to Islamabad to meet Pakistani authorities, signifies the great importance accorded by the Obama Administration to engage Pakistan on the serious issues of terrorism, extremism, and militancy, especially kidnappings and beheadings of foreigners. . . . The already existing sense of despair, frustration and anger on continuing drone attacks will accentuate, and will create instability and insurgency in Balochistan."

"Shaping US Strategy," an Op-ed by Dr Masooda Bano in the centrist national English daily "The News" (cir. 55,000) (03/27)

". . . The fact of the matter is that militancy in Pakistan can be checked much more effectively if the US was to stop its "war on terror" and stop making reform plans for Pakistan. Once the Pakistani state has no longer hopes of getting dollars to fight this war, it will find ways to deal with groups in the NWFP. People who are being called "Pakistani Taliban" were part of Pakistan prior to Sept 11 too, and so were the people in the tribal belt. . . . It would be good if the Obama administration decides to direct aid towards the long-term development needs of Pakistan rather than coming up with yet another set of quick fixes to check the militancy, which as has been seen throughout the Bush administration, will never work."

"Head Hunting," an editorial in the centrist national English daily "The News" (cir. 55,000) (03/27)

". . . US has offered large cash rewards for terrorism suspects in the past, but until recently they regarded Mehsud mainly as a threat to Pakistan and unworthy of their attention. Previous US drone attacks had avoided targeting Mehsud's hideouts but this changed earlier this month when US drones also began to target Mehsud and his men. The US State Department has identified Mehsud as a key leader of the Pakistani Taliban and an Al Qaeda 'facilitator' in South Waziristan. He is also fingered as a suspect in the killing of Benazir Bhutto and the Marriott bombing, plus he has made no bones about his intention of attacking the US if he can - and he probably can. All of this should qualify him for an early visit by Mr Predator and Mrs Hellfire -- if only he can be found, that is. It should not be difficult to find Baitullah Mehsud, any number of media persons knows where he is and so do others. Five million dollars is a lot of money and head-hunting via a bounty has loosened tongues in the past, so the technique is proven and the five million is peanuts as far as the US is concerned. It remains to be seen just how long hiding in plain view is an option for the elusive Mr Mehsud."

"Facing Challenges," an editorial in the Karachi based secular and pro-leftist Sindhi Daily "Awami Awaz" (Cir. 70,000) (03/27)

"The Obama administration is reviewing its Afghan policy, and there is a possibility that the war that the U.S. is fighting in Iraq and Afghanistan could now be directed to Pakistan too. And if that happens, it will certainly add to problems for the government."

"South Waziristan: U.S. Missile Strike," an editorial in the Lahore-based independent Urdu daily "Din" (circ. 5000) (03/27)
"Winning a war, whether it is against terrorism or whether it has another objective, is possible only with the support of the local populace. God forbid, a civil war like situation could arise if the increasing U.S. drone attacks in the tribal and border areas are not stopped - making things much worse than they are today. The country's intellectual circles are demanding that the government hold a strategic dialogue with the Obama administration instead of merely lodging protests."

"U.S. Admission Of Nawaz Sharif's Popularity," an editorial note in the second-largest, center-right nationalist Urdu daily "Nawa-i-Waqt" (cir. 125,000) (03/27)

"New York Times has admitted in a recent report that after leading judges reinstatement movement Mian Nawaz Sharif has become most popular in Pakistan, which is why America might make him partner in the war against terrorism.... Nawaz Sharif had a good friendship

with the U.S. ruling Democratic Party when he was Prime Minister of Pakistan. In this backdrop, the Obama administration cannot ignore Mian Nawaz Sharif. However, it does not mean that Nawaz Sharif will accept the role of frontline ally in the war against terrorism like General Musharraf and President Zardari.... Nawaz Sharif has earned this popularity on adopting a principled stand and he will not squander it for the sake of serving American interests."

"Maulana Fazalur Rehman, What Else Constitutes Interference?" an editorial note in the second-largest, center-right nationalist Urdu daily "Nawa-i-Waqt" (cir. 125,000) (03/27)

"Maulana Fazalur Rehman said that jihad could be announced if America tried to interfere in Pakistan's internal matter, which will be harmful for America.... American spy planes violate Pakistan airspace as a routine and kill innocent people.... God has given Maulana Fazal big eyes, but he does not seem to see this open interference by America."

"The Need For An International Inquiry Into Iraq War," an editorial in liberal Urdu daily "Express" (cir. 100,000) (03/27)

"British Foreign Minister Miliband has said that British troop withdrawal from Iraq would be complete by July 31, following which there will be an investigation into the war.... Since the Iraq war has resulted in wide-scale devastation and hundreds of thousands of deaths, the investigation should not be limited to Britain, answers must be found at the international level to the myriad questions the war has raised."

Patterson